

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Freedom of Information Act Branch  
601 South 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Arlington, VA 20598-6020**



**Transportation  
Security  
Administration**

July 12, 2019

**3600.1**

Case Number: 2019-TSFO-00510

Sai  
MuckRock News  
DEPT MR 75083  
411A Highland Ave  
Somerville, MA 02144-2516

Dear Sai:

This letter responds to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request submitted to the Transportation Security Administration, via email, dated June 14, 2019. Your request has been assigned FOIA request number 2019-TSFO-00510, for the following records:

“A. Agency HQ/PR emails with attribution designation phrases

I hereby request all emails:

1. from or to any email address, used in official capacity, of any person who, within 30 days of the time of the email, worked for:

- i) agency headquarters,
- ii) agency public relations,
- iii) agency counsel's office, or
- iv) any other component that regularly communicates with members of the press; and

2. containing any of the following phrases, regardless of capitalization or other minor variations:

- i) "on the record",
- ii) "off the record",
- iii) "on background",
- iv) "on deep background",
- v) "not for attribution",
- vi) "Chatham House rule",
- vii) "lobby terms", or
- viii) any synonymous phrases; and

3. that is in its original, native format as contained in either

- i) the agency's email / legal retention database(s) (such as Google Vault or similar service), or

- ii) the agency's email server(s) / database(s), searched directly.

In addition to the records specified in the request-specific section above, I also request:

B. all records relating to the fulfillment of this request, such as FOIA logs, documentation of searches, referral emails, etc.

C. all records relating to any complaint(s), FOIA request(s)/appeal(s), and/or Privacy Act request(s)/appeal(s) made by me. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. all records relating to the processing my previous requests, complaints, etc;
2. all records containing the terms my name, email address(es), and other contact or identifying information listed below my signature; and
3. all records containing any of my complaint, request or appeal identifiers.

For all responsive records, I also request:

D.

1. all parts of the record (i.e. no portion of a record with some responsive portion may be considered "nonresponsive");
2. all versions of the record, whether or not currently in use;
3. all record metadata, such as dates on which they were drafted, passed, went into effect, withdrawn, or similar events; person(s) / office(s) responsible; authors; IDs; revision numbers; etc.;
4. a detailed index of all claims of exemption/privilege, regardless of whether the record is claimed to be exempt in whole or in part; access to inspect the record directly, in its native electronic format; and
5. if any classification applies, mandatory declassification review (MDR) under E.O. 13526, and the result of the MDR, including any declassified records."

In addition, you stated that this request is "directed at BOTH Transportation Security Administration itself, and ALL components thereof, including any component agencies," and that TSA is "expected to provide notice of referrals made, and any other tracking numbers."

### **TSA's Response**

What follows is a summary of TSA's determinations regarding referral of records, your request for records and your request for a fee waiver.

### **Determination Regarding Referrals**

TSA does not have any component agencies, therefore no referrals to such component agencies can be made. To the extent the request seeks referrals to component offices within TSA, no such referrals are necessary since the TSA FOIA office handles FOIA requests for all offices within TSA.

### **Determination Regarding Request for Records**

After careful review of your FOIA request, we have determined that your request is too broad in scope and does not specifically identify the records which you are seeking. Records must be described in reasonably sufficient detail to enable government employees who are familiar with the subject area to locate records without placing an unreasonable burden upon the agency. For this reason, § 5.3(b) of the DHS regulations, 6 C.F.R. Part 5, requires that you describe the records you are seeking with as much

information as possible to ensure that our search can locate them with a reasonable amount of effort. Whenever possible, a request should include specific information about each record.

Regarding “Item A, “Agency HQ/PR emails with attribution designation phrases” and all sub-items thereunder, this portion of your request is overly broad and does not reasonably describe the records sought so as to allow agency personnel to locate them with a reasonable amount of effort. Simply stating “all e-mails . . . of any person who worked for” headquarters or other agency offices containing certain “phrases” (as well as “any synonymous phrases” and regardless of “minor variations”) does not sufficiently describe records to enable TSA to conduct a reasonable search. Similarly, TSA cannot, with a reasonable amount of effort, determine who, “within 30 days”, worked for TSA from the time of any given e-mail. If you would like TSA to conduct a search, please narrow the scope of your request by providing a discrete category of records, to include specific names, date(s)/timeframe(s), and a clearly defined subject for the record. If we have not heard from you by August 22, 2019, we will administratively close this part of your request.

Regarding “Item B, all records relating to the fulfillment of this request, such as FOIA logs, documentation of searches, referral, emails, etc.,” per the FOIA, an agency is only required to search for responsive records in their possession and control at the time a search is conducted. If you would like TSA to conduct a search, please provide additional information to reasonably describe what records you are seeking that the agency has in its possession at the time a search is conducted. If we have not heard from you by August 22, 2019, we will administratively close this part of your request

Regarding “Item C and all sub-items thereunder, all records relating to any complaint(s), FOIA request(s)/appeal(s), and/or Privacy Act request(s)/appeal(s) made by you.” You have made this request before, and it is being processed under TSA FOIA 2015-TSFO-00336. To the extent you are requesting additional records, please identify dates, locations, case numbers, or other specific criteria that will enable TSA to conduct a search. In its current form, this portion of your request is not reasonably described so as to enable agency personnel to locate them with a reasonable amount of effort. Please provide additional information, as noted above, to clarify this portion of the request as soon as possible and no later than 30 working days from the date of this letter. If we have not heard from you by August 22, 2019, we will administratively close this part of your request.

With respect to “Item D, sub-items 1, 2 and 5”, should you provide additional information to enable TSA to conduct a search, any records responsive to your request will be processed in the manner prescribed by the DHS FOIA regulations.

Regarding “Item D, sub-item 3, “All record metadata” this portion of your request is overly broad and does not reasonably describe the records sought as to allow agency personnel to locate them with a reasonable amount of effort. The request as outlined would encompass millions of records and likely terabytes of data. Furthermore, agencies are required to provide a responsive record in any form or format requested by the person if the record is readily reproducible by the agency in that form or format.<sup>1</sup> This means that FOIA requests must be processed in a requested format if the capability exists to respond to the request in that format. The TSA FOIA office uses a DHS web-based application to manage the FOIA process that includes the processing and production of responsive records. This system processes all records in a PDF format. Therefore, the records are only reproducible by TSA in a PDF format. As a result of the records being converted to a PDF, the file and file system data or metadata from the raw format of the records processed are not available. Thus, TSA will be unable to produce records responsive to this portion of your request in the manner you seek, even if it were reasonably described

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<sup>1</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(J)(B).

Also, with respect to "Item D, sub-item 4, "A detailed index of all claims of exemption," you have requested that TSA provide a *Vaughn* Index. With regard to the timing of the creation of a *Vaughn* Index, it is well settled that a requester is not entitled to receive one during the administrative process. Accordingly, I am denying this portion of your request.

Should you provide additional information such that those portions of your request that are not reasonably described become reasonably described, we have determined that your request meets the "Unusual Circumstances" criteria of the FOIA due to one or more of the following:

- There is a need to search for and collect records from separate offices;
- There is a need to search for, collect, and examine a voluminous amount of records; or
- There is a need for consultations with another agency or among two or more components within the same agency.

Therefore, we will not be able to complete the processing of your request within 30 working days (20 working days plus 10 additional business days allowed for "unusual circumstances"). If you have any questions or wish to discuss reformulation or an alternative time frame for the processing of your request, please contact the analyst who is processing your request. You may send an e-mail to [foia@tsa.dhs.gov](mailto:foia@tsa.dhs.gov), call 571-227-2300 or toll free 1-866-364-2872, or you may contact our FOIA Public Liaison in the same manner.

### **Determination Regarding Fees**

Provisions of the Act allow us to recover part of the cost of complying with your request. You indicated in your letter that you are not willing to pay fees for the processing of this request, but may be willing to pay if it is necessary. Should we receive additional information from you that would enable TSA to conduct a search, we shall charge you for records in accordance with the DHS FOIA regulations as they apply to all other requestors. You will receive the first two hours of search time at no charge and the first 100 pages at no charge. In the event that a search for records exceeds two hours and/or responsive records exceed 100 pages, you will be notified and we will then provide you with a fee estimate for those portions of your request that are reasonably described. Any further work on your request will not continue until you commit, in writing, to pay the estimated fee amount, another agreed upon designated fee amount or if necessary, modify the portion of your request that is reasonably described.

As it relates to your fee waiver request, I have reviewed your letter and have determined that you have not presented a convincing argument that you are entitled to a blanket waiver of fees.

Per DHS FOIA Regulations, 6 CFR § 5.11(k), a component may reduce or waive fees when it is determined, (i) disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government; and (ii) disclosure of the information is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

To determine whether the first fee waiver requirement is met, components will consider the following factors:

- (i) The subject of the request: Whether the subject of the requested records concerns "the operations or activities of the government." The subject of the requested records must concern identifiable operations or activities of the federal government, with a connection that is direct and clear, not remote or attenuated.

- (ii) The informative value of the information to be disclosed: Whether the disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of government operations or activities.
- (iii) The contribution to an understanding of the subject by the public likely to result from disclosure: Whether disclosure of the requested information will contribute to “public understanding.”
- (iv) The significance of the contribution to public understanding: Whether the disclosure is likely to contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities.

To determine whether the second fee waiver requirement is met, components will consider the following factors:

- (i) The existence and magnitude of a commercial interest: Whether the requester has a commercial interest that would be furthered by the requested disclosure.
- (ii) The primary interest in disclosure: Whether any identified commercial interest of the requester is sufficiently large, in comparison with the public interest in disclosure, that disclosure is “primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.”

As a requester, you bear the burden under the FOIA of showing that the fee waiver requirements have been met.

Based on my review of your June 14, 2019, letter and for the reasons stated herein, I have determined that your fee waiver request is deficient because your request for a fee waiver has failed to meet all factors per DHS FOIA Regulations, 6 CFR § 5.11(k) as required. Specifically, for the items you requested, you failed to detail with any specificity the informative value of the information being requested; how it will be likely to contribute to an understanding of government operations or activities; how it will contribute to public understanding, or how it will contribute significantly to public understanding of government operations or activities. Also, your intent to share this info w ith the media does not entitle you to a public interest fee waiver.

Furthermore, your request to be recognized as “a representative of the news media” for the purpose of assessing fees is also denied for failure to meet the statutory definition of “a representative of the news media” in the OPEN Government Act of 2007. Per the OPEN Government Act of 2007, a “representative of the news media” is defined as “any person or entity that gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw materials into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience; defining “news” as “information that is about current events or that would be of current interest to the public.”

You stated in your request, “I intend and am able to host and publish all received records online to the general public at no charge, as well to publish highlights, analyses, summaries, commentaries, and other creative, original journalistic and scientific work about responsive records through multiple online publications, as part of Fiat Fiendum's work.”

I have reviewed your internet sites and they do not show that you have “turned the raw materials into distinct work,” only that you have posted documents received via your FOIA requests. Merely making the information received available to the public (or others) fails to meet the statutory definition of a representative of the news media nor is it likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government. Furthermore, you have failed to provide any definitive

examples of your “journalistic publications” or any commentary or analysis; and your intentions to do so are not enough. Simply being the publisher of a website is not sufficient for you to qualify for a journalistic fee waiver. Any personal benefit derived by you is not a consideration entitling you to a fee waiver. Also, agencies take into account the identity and qualifications of the requester in order to determine whether the public would benefit from disclosure to that requester. The majority of materials you have made available constitute otherwise unpublished academic work and essays as well as records obtained through FOIA requests. Furthermore, to the extent that any of your postings may have been picked-up and referenced by recognized news media outlets, such action on their part does not enhance your claim to be “a representative of the news media.”

### **Opportunity for Administrative Appeal**

Should you decide to file an appeal regarding TSA’s fee waiver determination, it should be mailed to:

Christine Griggs  
Acting FOIA Appeals Officer  
Office of Civil Rights & Liberties, Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement (CRL/OTE)  
Transportation Security Administration  
701 South 12<sup>th</sup> Street, West Building, TSA-33  
Arlington, VA 20598-6033

Your appeal **must be submitted within 90 days** from the date of this determination. It should contain your FOIA request number and, to the extent possible, the reasons why you believe the initial determination should be reversed. In addition, the envelope should be prominently marked “FOIA Appeal.” Please note that the TSA FOIA Appeals Officer’s determination of the appeal will be administratively final.

Additionally, you have the right to seek dispute resolution services from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) which mediates disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. If you are requesting access to your own records (which is considered a Privacy Act request), you should know that OGIS does not have the authority to handle requests made under the Privacy Act of 1974. You may contact OGIS as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001; e-mail at [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov); telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5796.

If you have any questions pertaining to your request, please feel free to contact the FOIA Branch at 1-866-364-2872 or locally at 571-227-2300.

Sincerely,



Teri M. Miller  
FOIA